

Cumberland Gap: A Symbol of American Identity

An Honors Thesis
(HONRS 499)

by

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A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Gail S. Terry". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

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Abstract

This thesis argues that the Cumberland Gap has served as an important symbol in shaping American national identity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the nineteenth century, the Gap became intertwined with the legend of Daniel Boone. In the twentieth, it became an icon in Frederick Jackson Turner's interpretation of the American frontier. The introduction briefly discusses Turner's thesis, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*, and its application to Cumberland Gap. Part I examines the history of Cumberland Gap and the historical activities of Daniel Boone in earliest Kentucky. Boone's legendary exploits as a pathfinder on the frontier before, during, and after the American Revolutionary Era provided Americans with one component of their national identity. Part II focuses on the Cumberland Gap National Historical Park and the preservation of the historical landscape. The park links its interpretation of the Gap to the mythical Boone, but in its efforts to return the Gap to its eighteenth-century appearance, it perpetuates a Turnerian view of the frontier. The National Park Service has transformed the region into a symbol of American identity on two levels. The park symbolizes the role of the frontier in American history. The tunnel, a grand feat in the field of civil engineering, resonates with the words of Turner. It is now literally possible to stand at Cumberland Gap and watch the waves of progress pass by. In its entirety, this thesis reveals the continuous role of the dual mythologies of Daniel Boone and Frederick Jackson Turner in shaping American national identity.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks are due to Dr. Gail S. Terry, my thesis advisor, for her role in this rigorous process. She encouraged me to take on a project that focused on the Wilderness Road. She guided my reading and research while encouraging me to explore the Cumberland Gap National Historical Park to see what we could find. There was no specific topic at the onset of this project. With Dr. Terry's guidance, I found a road, a park, and a town that symbolizes American identity. Her comments and superior editorial advice were invaluable. Thank you for your patience and understanding in this quest for scholarship.

Many thanks also go to Lawrence Seabolt, the man who took me there. Lawrence and his wife Gloria are excellent tour guides of the Eastern Tennessee region. When I told them of this project, they drove me all over Cumberland and Clinch Mountains to retrace the Wilderness Road. I also thank them for the quotable information that they provided for the body of the paper.

This project could not have been completed without the help of my parents. Although my mother, Patricia Ann Butcher, was not alive to see the fruition of this work, her love for history and family vacations provided the essential tools needed to complete this project. Thank you Mom for taking me to Cumberland Gap.

*In loving memory of
Patricia Ann Butcher*

(April 10, 1949 to August 25, 2001)

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was not alive to see the fruition of this work,
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Since the era of the American Revolutionary War, the once British colonists have struggled to shed their British identity and establish a distinctively American one.¹ Pictures of Benjamin Franklin before and after 1776 show the change. As a British citizen living in the American colonies, Franklin dressed according to British custom. After the war for independence, Franklin dressed in the fashions of the frontier.² On a quest to shape its own identity, America exchanged a powdered wig for a coonskin cap. America turned to the frontier.

In his late nineteenth-century essay, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*, the premier historian of the American frontier Frederick Jackson Turner asserted that, "The frontier is the line of most rapid and effective Americanization."³ For Turner the frontier was the outer edge of a wave of white settlement, the meeting point between savagery and civilization. Every time the edge of the wave moved forward, the outcome became less like an old product of Europe and more like a new product of America. "The isolation of the region increased its peculiarly American tendencies, and the need of transportation facilities to connect it with the East called out important schemes of internal improvement ... The "West" as a self-conscious section, began to evolve."⁴ Turner's frontier thesis gave a powerful boost to the frontier as an important locus of the American identity.⁵ According to contemporary historian David Lowenthal, "Up to the end of the nineteenth century, pioneer environments were seen as debilitating and

¹ For a discussion of this process see Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt and Margaret Jacob, *Telling The Truth About History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1994), chap. 3.

² Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Louis P. Masur (Boston & New York: Bedford Books, 1993), 19-24.

³ Frederick Jackson Turner, *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner*, commentary John Mack Faragher (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994), 33.

⁴ Turner, 35.

⁵ For recent criticisms of Turner's conception of the frontier, see Richard W. Etulain, ed., *Does the Frontier Experience Make America Exceptional?* (Boston & New York: Bedford/ St. Martin's, 1999).

corrupting, not virtuous or enlivening.”⁶ Turner’s essay transformed America’s perception of the frontier. It was no longer seen as a handicap, to be overcome, but as a heritage, something to be revered.



Visitors can stand at the Pinnacle Overlook and see three states, Kentucky, Virginia, and Tennessee. From this angle, one can see the town of Cumberland Gap, Tennessee and the Tennessee side of the tunnel.
Picture Taken October 2001

Nestled in the corner where Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee meet, the Cumberland Gap National Historical Park represents the epitome of the American identity as described by Turner. One can almost literally “stand at Cumberland Gap and watch the procession of civilization, marching single file – the buffalo following the trail to the salt springs, the Indian, the fur-trader and hunter, the cattle raiser, the pioneer farmer – and the

frontier has passed by.”⁷ The area surrounding Cumberland Gap offers visitors the opportunity to bask in American achievement. In their efforts to preserve the Wilderness Road through the Cumberland Gap, the United States Department of the Interior has created an experience that allows tourists to see how American pioneers have progressed from a narrow footpath over a mountain to a four-lane highway running through a mountain. The attempt of the national park to capture the true American experience actually perpetuates several American myths. The efforts of the park to restore the Wilderness Road to its eighteenth-century state links the gap to the legendary figure of Daniel Boone, and the park’s interpretation of this historic site encourages the Turnerian

⁶ David Lowenthal “Pioneer Museums” *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment*, ed. Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 119. Although Lowenthal makes a distinction between a frontiersman and a pioneer my contention is that in this instance Boone is both. Cumberland Gap National Historical Park is also a frontier and pioneer museum. Therefore Lowenthal’s analysis of pioneer museums applies.

⁷ Turner, 39.

image of pioneers as self-reliant individuals who had an unfailing zest for life and a confidence in achievement.⁸ *A Cumberland Gap Area Guidebook* asserts that, “This passage through the mountains set the stage for one of the greatest stories recorded by mankind. It was the prelude to manifest destiny. It is pure American history!”⁹ Although it may be to the financial benefit of the museum and the region to portray these myths as truths, the role of the wilderness road through the Cumberland Gap in perpetuating an American identity cannot be fully understood without probing the myths associated with Daniel Boone and the settlement of Kentucky and those associated with the Turnerian idea of the frontier.

Part I

Cumberland Gap, The Wilderness Road, and the Legend of Daniel Boone

“The opening of the West really begins with Daniel Boone ... Daniel Boone broke the chain that had confined settlers to a ribbon of shoreline for nearly two centuries. With Boone, Americans took off and created a continental empire.”¹⁰ Dr. Robert V. Remini, emeritus professor of history in the University of Illinois at Chicago, spoke these words at the annual Boone Day celebration in Frankfort, Kentucky, on June 6, 1992. His words, laden with myth and legend, capture why Americans celebrate the life of Daniel Boone. Americans celebrate Boone because he is a hero, an oversimplified hero used by Americans to commemorate monumental events that shaped the American identity. Boone gained legendary status in Kentucky during his own lifetime, but Boone’s biographers and contemporaries attributed many activities to him that were not

⁸ Lowenthal, 120-121.

⁹ Tom N. Shattuck, *A Cumberland Gap Area Guidebook*, 2d ed. (Middlesboro, KY: Wilderness Road Company, 1999), 3.

¹⁰ Robert V. Remini, “The Early Heroes of Kentucky,” *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 90, no. 3 (1992): 226, 225-235.

Boone's to claim. Boone did forge a road through Kentucky and he did start a settlement, but neither of his contributions were the first in Kentucky and neither were created by the sole efforts of Boone. Because of the myths and the legend started even before Boone's death, Boone has remained an everlasting symbol of the first American frontier.

It is no wonder Daniel Boone became a mythical character. Ever since John Filson published *The Adventures of Col. Daniel Boone* in 1784, Boone and his experiences have been exaggerated. Rev. Timothy Flint published a biographical memoir of Daniel Boone in 1833. Those who knew the real Boone called *The First Settler of Kentucky* "little better than a caricature." Kentucky historian Mann Butler even chided Flint for his fabrications.¹¹ It is impossible to completely separate verifiable historical fact from legend in the life of Daniel Boone,¹² but an examination of events surrounding the early Anglo-American settlement of Kentucky reveal the extent to which Boone was but one of many actors.

Dr. Thomas Walker first mapped the Wilderness Road for British colonial white men in April 1750. "The trace or Warrior's Path through Cumberland Gap had extensive use made of it by Shawnee, Cherokee and other eastern woodland tribes."¹³ Walker encountered the old Indian road near Big Lick, present day Roanoke, Virginia, while exploring for the Loyal Land Company.¹⁴ The path was one of least resistance, blazed through the mountains by buffalo that were seeking the salt licks of Kentucky and Virginia. On April 13, 1750, Walker recorded this entry in his journal:

¹¹ Lyman C. Draper, LL.D, *The Life of Daniel Boone* ed. Ted Franklin Belue (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1998), 4, 10.

¹² John Mack Faragher, *Daniel Boone: The Life and Legend of an American Pioneer*, (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1992).

¹³ Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *Location of the Wilderness Road at Cumberland Gap National Historical Park* (August 1987), by Jere L. Krakow, 2.

¹⁴ Department of the Interior, *Location of the Wilderness Road*, 25.

“We went four miles to large Creek, which we called Cedar Creek, being a Branch of Beargrass, and from thence Six miles to Cave Gap, the land being Level. On the North side of the Gap is a large Spring, which falls very fast, and just above the Spring is a small Entrance to a large Cave, which the Spring runs



The spring Walker described still runs down the hill and is strong enough to run a mill. Squire Boone's mill, at the base of the hill, is now part of the décor for the Old Mill Bed and Breakfast.

Picture Taken April 2002

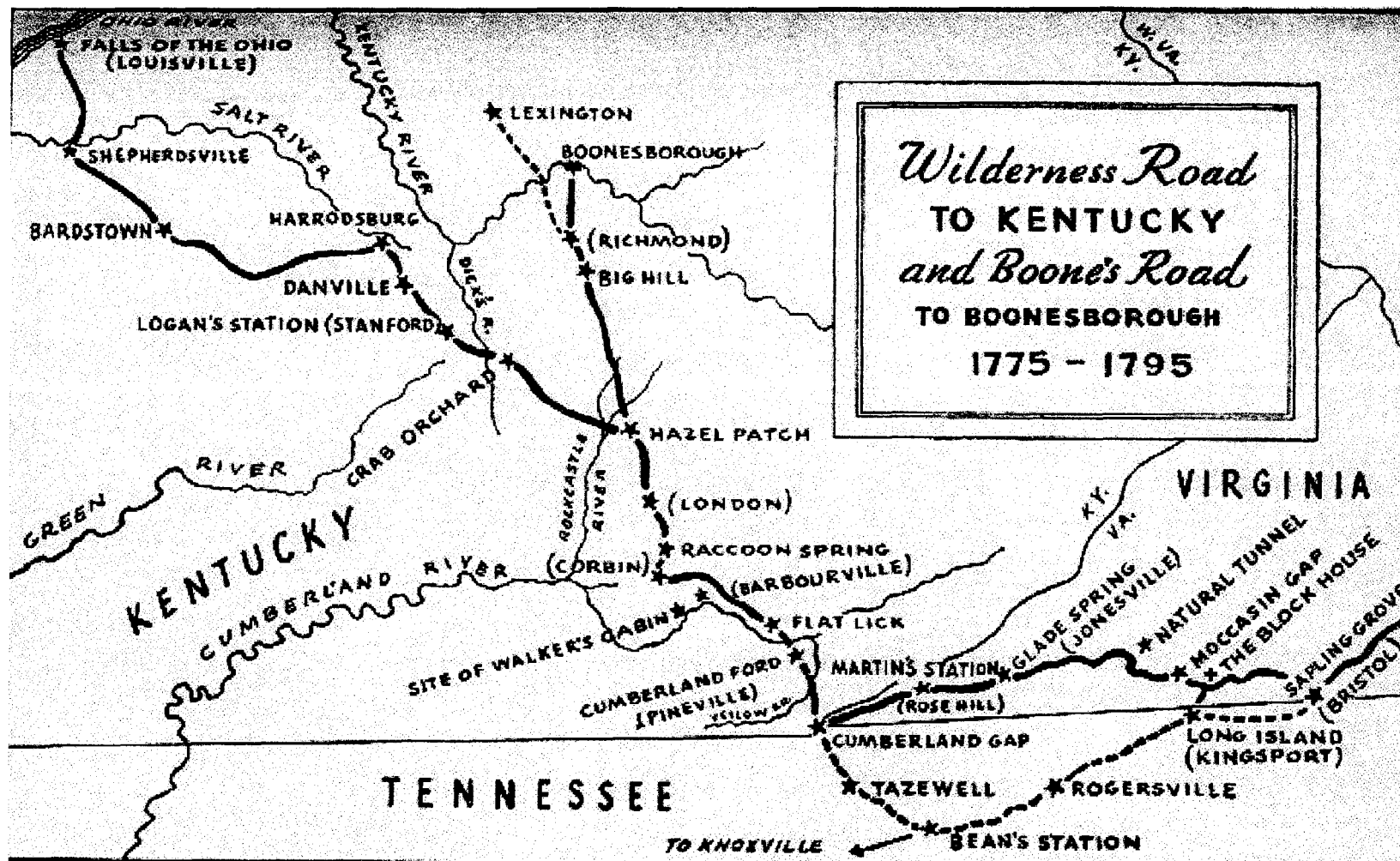
through, and there is a constant Stream of Cool air issuing out. The Spring is sufficient to turn a mill. Just at the foot of the Hill is a Laurel Thicket, and the Spring Water runs through it. On the South side is a plain Indian Road. On the top of the Ridge are Laurel Trees marked with crosses, others Blazed and several Figures on them. As I went down on the Other Side, I soon came to some Laurel in the head of a Branch. A Beech stands on the left hand, on which I cut my name. This Gap may be seen at a considerable distance, and there is no other, that I know of, except one about two miles to the North of it, which does not appear to be So low as the other. The Mountain on the North Side of the Gap is very Steep and Rocky, but on the South side it is not So. We called it Steep Ridge. At the foot of the hill on the North West Side we came to a Branch, that made a great deal of flat Land. We kept down it 2 miles, Several other Branches Coming in to make it a large Creek, and we called it Flat Creek. We camped on the Bank where we found very good Coal. I did not Se any Lime Stone beyond this Ridge. We rode 13 miles this day.”¹⁵

Walker named the mountain Cumberland after the Duke of Cumberland who put down the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745 in Great Britain. The name Cave Gap was changed to Cumberland Gap by later explorers. It would provide the gateway to Kentucky that gave Daniel Boone much of his fame.



A replica of the Walker Cabin, the first cabin constructed in Kentucky, is commemorated at the Thomas Walker State Park.
Picture Taken April 2002

¹⁵ Draper, 53.



MAP OF WILDERNESS ROAD SHOWING
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY LOCATIONS

Source: Robert L. Kincaid, *The Wilderness Road* (Indianapolis & New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1947), 77.

Boone, like Walker, initially journeyed to Kentucky to make money. While Walker was a land speculator, looking for ground to add to the Virginia colony, Boone was a hunter, looking for deer, otter, beaver, and bearskins to sell. Their drive west was economic in origins. The glorified version of Boone as a self-reliant, courageous, discoverer is largely based on the writings of nineteenth-century authors interpreting Boone's actions after the fact. Even the well-known nineteenth-century manuscripts collector and frontier chronicler, Lyman Draper, who said his interest in Boone was to do full justice to his memory and worth, and present him to the world in his real character, has canonized the frontier woodsman.

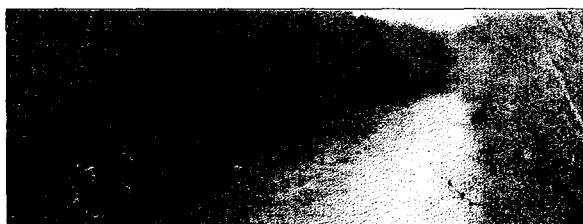
Daniel Boone first set foot on Kentucky soil in 1769, when one John Findley convinced him to leave the Yadkin River country of North Carolina for a long hunt. Findley told Boone of the abundant buffalo, bear, and deer in the region. According to Draper, it was the "Eldorado of the West," ...the description of which so completely filled his beau ideal of a hunter's paradise." Boone tempted by the fortunes to be had, left his wife and family for two years to explore the Kentucky wilderness.¹⁶

Upon their return, six to eight Indians overtook Boone and another companion near the Gap. The men lost their animal skins and horses, and when they tried to reclaim their horses, they were taken captive and transported towards the Ohio River. Before crossing the river, the two men escaped, and Boone said that they had been "forced to fly for their lives."¹⁷ This escape provided Boone with the opportunity to follow the salt licks and chart his way through Kentucky back home to North Carolina. Draper quotes Boone as saying upon his return in 1771 that "those fertile plains were unequaled on our earth,

¹⁶ Draper, 135.

¹⁷ Draper, 267.

and laid the fairest claim to the description of the Garden of God.”¹⁸ Stories told by woodsmen that glorified the beauty of Kentucky and its abundant wildlife attracted settlers. Many were not dismayed by the fact that Boone and his companion were separated during their flight and the latter was never seen again. In 1773, Captain William Russell, a western Virginia big wig, hired Boone to lead an expedition into Kentucky. Boone packed up his family and traveled with the Russell party toward Cumberland Gap. In Powell Valley, Indians attacked one of the three camps and murdered Boone’s eldest son. They abandoned the expedition and returned to the Clinch



The Powell River was named for Ambrose Powell, one of Thomas Walker’s 1750 expedition companions.

Picture Taken April 2002

River country.¹⁹

In 1775, Boone received another chance to improve his lot in life when Richard Henderson, a North Carolina land speculator, asked him to

help organize the Cherokee so that Henderson could sign a treaty with the Indian nation and purchase Kentucky land from them. Henderson also hired Boone to forge a road from the Powell River Valley to the Kentucky River at Big Lick (later Boonesborough) that was big enough for wagons to pass through the Gap.²⁰ In exchange, Boone would receive land in Kentucky.



The Wilderness Road Trail at Cumberland Gap
National Historical Park.
Picture Taken April 2002

¹⁸ Draper, 101.

¹⁹ Neal O. Hammon, ed., *My Father, Daniel Boone: The Draper Interviews with Nathan Boone* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 39-41.

²⁰ Hammon, *My Father, Daniel Boone*, 29.

Boone departed before Henderson to clear the road and prepare the settlement for Henderson's arrival. Geography prevented Boone and his men from widening the path through the Gap enough to allow a wagon to pass safely into Kentucky, and for that reason Henderson had to stop at Martin's Station to reorganize the cargo in order to pass through the Gap. Here he received a letter from Boone stating that Shawnee Indians had fired upon Boone and his company. Some of Henderson's men turned back, but Henderson, following Boone's advice, pushed through the Gap and continued towards the new settlement.²¹

Most of the small number of Americans living in Kentucky at this time had traveled in sets of two or three. As Henderson passed through the Gap he met a group of frantic men "returning from the Cantuckey on account of the late murders by the Indians." The fright was contagious. Many of Henderson's men, including business partner Thomas Hart, returned to the Powell Valley.²² Henderson pressed on.

In 1775, Boonesborough was not the only significant settlement in Kentucky. James Harrod had led a group of men back to the site of Harrodsburg. The group arrived before Boone and his party reached the Kentucky River and erected their settlement.²³ With the onset of attacks by the Shawnees, Indians who considered Kentucky their hunting ground and viewed the Cherokees as their enemies, the Anglo-American settlements worked together to ensure security on the frontier. Boonesborough, Harrodsburg, and St. Asaph, a smaller settlement started by Benjamin Logan who had

²¹ Faragher, 113-117.

²² Faragher, 117.

²³ Faragher, 117.

traveled with Boone yet parted his company to follow Skaggs Trace, organized the proprietary government of Transylvania.²⁴

According to Lowenthal, self-reliance, manliness, and faith in progress are pioneer traits that recur over and over as museum themes. "Life's stern necessities required the pioneer family to act on its own in a fashion inconceivable in highly organized modern society. Inner-directed, sure of his goals, the resolute pioneer that museums portray is a self-reliant individual."²⁵ The settlement of Kentucky supports Lowenthal's argument that such self-reliance was not the case at all. The successful settlements, Boonesborough, Harrodsburg, and St. Asaph, were all started by groups. The settlements remained successful because they worked together to secure protection and order. They even organized their own government, a characteristic of the civilized East.

Logan had little regard for Henderson's claim of ownership but sent delegates to the preliminary meetings for a proposed new colony. James Harrod and his men began with a tolerance of Henderson, but by 1775 were "boldly defying his pretensions."²⁶ George Rogers Clark, a young Virginia surveyor, visited Harrodsburg during the summer of 1775 and listened to disgruntled citizens talk about Henderson, his land company, and the increasing population of Boonesborough. "Clark returned to Virginia for the winter of 1775-1776 and heard the denunciation of Henderson by the authorities and decided that it was time to bring the issue to a head."²⁷ He returned to Harrodsburg advised the settlers to make an official protest to the Virginia Assembly. Harrod sent a petition back to Virginia via Clark that stated that he and the settlers of Harrodsburg were greatly alarmed

²⁴ Robert L. Kincaid, *The Wilderness Road* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1947), 11.

²⁵ Lowenthal, 120.

²⁶ Kincaid, 127.

²⁷ Kincaid, 127.

at the conduct of the men who styled themselves proprietors. They also stated their concern of raising prices for acreage from thirty to fifty shillings for each hundred acres. They urged the Virginia Convention to take measures at once to restore peace and harmony to their divided settlement.²⁸ Henderson's land company, the Transylvania Company, was unable to maintain its claim and purchase.²⁹ Henderson never paid Boone for his services. Although Boone's name adorned this early settlement, he made little money off of the endeavor.

The settlers of Harrodsburg were not happy with Henderson's Transylvania Company government, and the settlers eventually requested the intervention of the Virginia Colony to maintain prices and provide protection from the Indians. The settlers even demanded representation in the Virginia Assembly. As Lowenthal succinctly explains, "Few museums visitors would guess that pioneers were crucially dependent on supplies and markets, advice and culture, ultimately on military support from Washington or some territorial capital; far from being autonomous, they were wholly bound up with larger American institutions."³⁰ Even though the United States government had not yet come into existence, during this period, the lifeline of Kentucky settlers remained the Wilderness Road. Most Americans today think that Boone blazed the first road to Kentucky and helped found the first settlement. Both beliefs are incorrect. Harrod used Skaggs Trace to reach his planned site for settlement in 1774, and Harrod and his men settled Harrodsburg before Boone and Henderson even ventured out of the Clinch River Valley with the Transylvania settlers in 1775. In fact, Boone is said to have visited the newly established settlement at Harrodsburg in June of 1774, when he and Michael

²⁸ Kincaid, 129-130.

²⁹ Hammon, *My Father, Daniel Boone*, 44.

³⁰ Lowenthal, 120.

Stoner made a trip into Kentucky to recall some Virginia surveyors.³¹ Other early explorers and surveyors also used Skaggs Trace during the same year Boone settled Boonesborough. The settlement of St. Asaph along Skaggs Trace not long after the settlement of Boonesborough is more evidence that Skaggs Trace was in existence before Boone's.³²

The reason why Boone, Boone's Trace, and Boonesborough outshine Harrod, Skaggs trace, and Harrodsburg in memory is because of Boone's status in the backcountry and the role of storytelling in the backwoods culture. Boone was known as an excellent woodsman, especially for his knowledge of the Kentucky region. "His mission to Kentucky brought Boone prominently to the attention of the officers of the Virginia frontier militia. John Floyd, who had led one of the surveying parties, wrote to his patron Colonel William Preston of the effort Boone had made to locate the Virginians – "for which reason I love the man"- and reported that he enjoyed a reputation among the settlers that was greater than any other man under arms. Major Arthur Campbell similarly wrote to Preston that Boone was "a very popular officer where he is known."³³ Among the residents to the Clinch, Boone was considered the "the best man to call in an emergency."³⁴ His status as a woodsmen and leader before the Boonesborough settlement combined with his experiences while forging the settlement contributed to Boone becoming a national hero. The telling of Boone's exploits by himself and area settlers magnified Boone's heroic status to legendary proportion. Over time, the legend of Boone subsumed all the heroic efforts of the first settlers of Kentucky.

³¹ Neal O. Hammon, "Early Roads Into Kentucky," *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 62, no. 2 (1970): 93, 91-131.

³² Hammon, "Early Roads into Kentucky," 93.

³³ Faragher, 102.

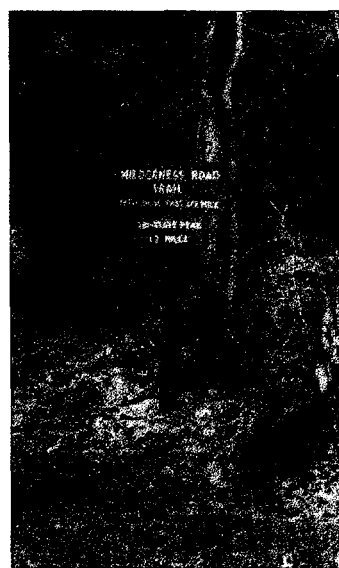
³⁴ Faragher, 105.

Part II

Cumberland Gap & American Identity: Cumberland Gap National Historic Park

Visitors are attracted to The Cumberland Gap National Historical Park because of scenic landscape and the mythical Daniel Boone. This romantic hero symbolizes the adventurous, self-reliant, trail blazing pioneer who faced the frontier to extend civilization. By expanding the Wilderness Road, Boone, the first pathfinder, helped Cumberland Gap to become an instrument by which an empire was built and civilization maintained, “a dynamic artery of vast historical importance.”³⁵

When the United States Department of the Interior first organized the Gap as a national park in 1940, its purpose was to “commemorate the migration of hundreds of thousands of people who moved from the populous eastern states west across the Appalachian Mountains by way of Cumberland Gap to settle land in Kentucky, Tennessee, and beyond in the late eighteenth and



The Wilderness Road Trail entrance is part of the park renovations taking place near the Iron Furnace in the town of Cumberland Gap, Tennessee. *Pictures Taken April 2002*

nineteenth centuries.” Cumberland Gap was the first and best avenue for the settlement of the interior of the United States. During its heyday from 1775 to 1810, the Gap saw between 200,000 and 300,000 men, women, and children pass into the unknown land of

³⁵ Introduction, Kincaid, quotation; on Boone, see Faragher, chap. 10.

Kentucky.³⁶ Today the Gap is seen by over one million people annually who come to the park to retrace the steps of Daniel Boone.³⁷ They can walk the Wilderness Road, hike the paths of long hunters, and participate in interpretive programs that attempt to recreate the frontier experience. To recreate and promote the eighteenth-century landscape, the Cumberland Gap National Historical Park relies on transportation innovations of the twentieth century. Four-lane highways bring visitors from across the nation to experience the animal trail of the woodsman and the wagon trail of the pioneer farmer. At the same time engineers have sought to restore the view from the Pinnacle above the Gap to its eighteenth-century appearance by concealing the modern road within a tunnel under the mountain. The recent excavation and renovation of the Cumberland Gap National Historical Park is not an accident. The U.S. Department of the Interior and the Department of Transportation have been working together to stimulate the economy of Appalachia via the National Park Service and its facility at the Gap.

Until the late 1990s, U.S. highway 25 E was a two-lane road that followed a path very close to that of Boone's 1775 trace. Over the years parts of the road had been straightened and widened, but when it came to the Gap, Boone and the modern road builders faced similar problems—the passage between the mountains was too narrow to permit widening the road. The saddle of the Gap remained a two-lane highway contoured to the dangerous curves of Cumberland Mountain. Increased traffic and the outdated

³⁶ Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, <http://www.nps.gov/cuga/>; Internet; accessed 11 May 2002.

³⁷ Cumberland Gap National Historical Park <http://www.nps.gov/cuga/pphtml/activities.html>; Internet; accessed 11 May 2002.

roads caused numerous accidents, and the “passage became known as Massacre Mountain.”³⁸

In the 1950s, the federal Department of Transportation considered U.S. 25 E as a route for the new Interstate Highway System. The National Park Services feared widening the road would destroy the historic landscape, and encouraged the transportation department to seek an alternative route. For this reason, the government bypassed the Gap when constructing the Interstate Highway System. This decision “predestined the communities” of the Cumberland Gap area “to be located in a zone isolated from modern highways and commercial growth.”³⁹

Gloria Seabolt, 56, and a lifelong resident of Cumberland Gap area, remembers the majority of the roads there as gravel in the mid-twentieth century. The only paved roads were U.S. highway 58 and U.S. 25 E. Growing up she called U.S. 58 “the little highway” and U.S. 25 E “the big highway.” The distinction was based on the width of the roads and the quality of the paved surface. She and her husband Lawrence noted that the roads were extremely crooked. “There was one curve on the Kentucky side of the Gap where you could reach back and touch your tail light when you went around it,” Lawrence Seabolt said.⁴⁰ Gloria laughed and exclaimed, “It wasn’t hard to touch your taillight on some of them curves. They were deep.”

The roads into the town of Cumberland Gap were terrible, Gloria recalled. “Cumberland Gap was not even on the map except looking at it from the Pinnacle.”⁴¹ She explained that to reach the town, you had to park on the side of the mountain and

³⁸ Shattuck, 29.

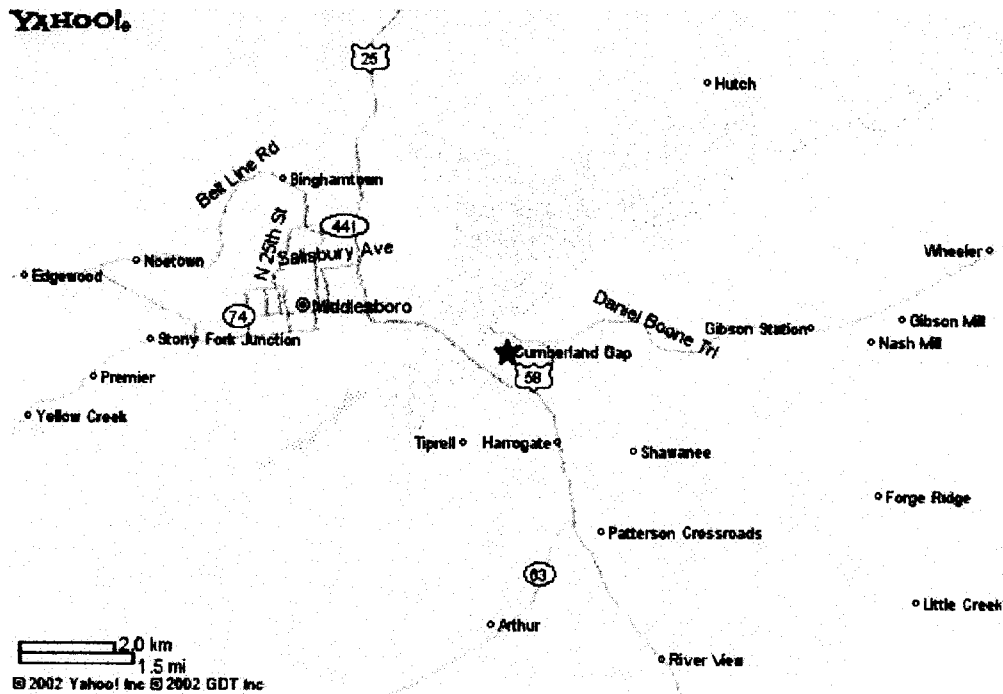
³⁹ Shattuck, 29.

⁴⁰ Lawrence Seabolt of Morristown, Tennessee, interview by author, 14 May 2002.

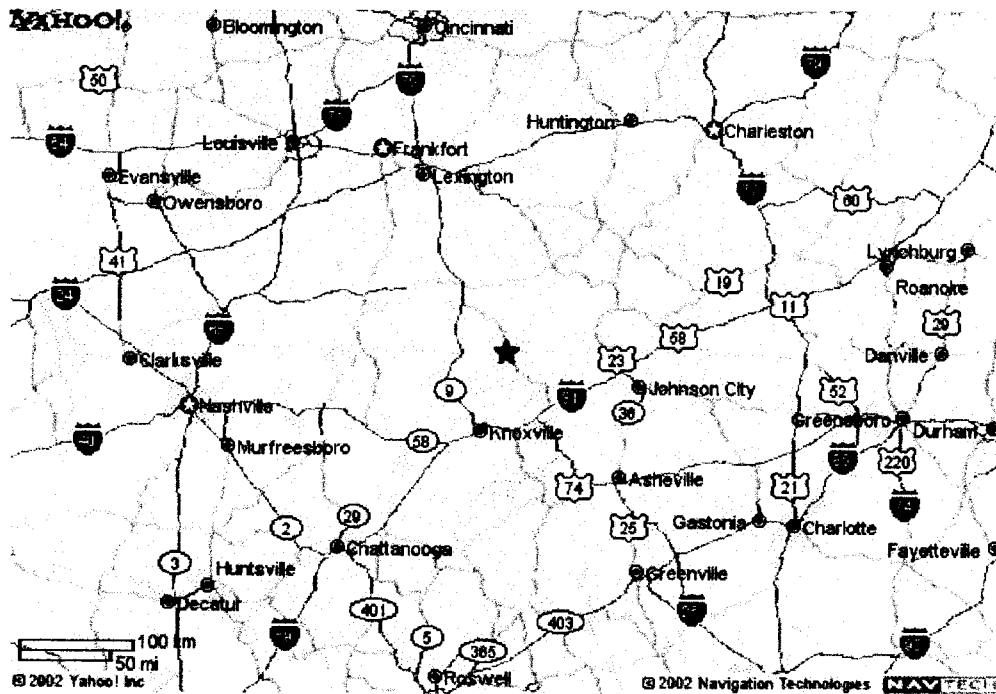
⁴¹ Gloria Seabolt of Morristown, Tennessee, interview by author, 14 May 2002.

MAPS OF U.S. 25 E AND THE INTERSTATE HIGHWAY SYSTEM

YAHOO!



YAHOO!



Source: www.yahoo.com- Maps; Internet; accessed 20 May 2002.

walk down a small path. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, the park seemed to be just as desolate as the town.

Gloria said that the first time she went to the Cumberland Gap National Historical Park was during a high school field trip. The main roads in the park where not paved like they are now. "The paths were like dog trails." Gloria explained that to get to a clearing you had to break through the bushes. The paths and the picnic areas were just cut out, not cleaned out. Not until after she was married in 1965 did Gloria recall that the park started to pave the roads and clean out the trails and picnic areas.⁴²



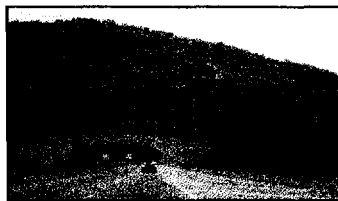
The Louisville-Nashville Railroad through Cumberland Mountain parallels the twin bore tunnel. *Picture Taken October 2001*



In the 1970s, the National Park Service

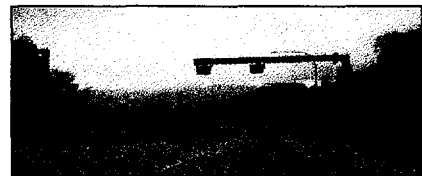
reasoned that the only way to "preserve" the landscape was to build a tunnel through the mountain. A test tunnel ten feet wide by ten feet high was

The park has tried to camouflage the entrance of the tunnel by using vegetation and materials similar to the native landscape of the Gap. Thirty people are on duty at all times to monitor the tunnel and provide rescue aid twenty-four hours a day. *Tunnel Pictures Taken November 1996*



The speed limit through the tunnel is 45 mph. Cars are not allowed to pass each other in the tunnel and vehicles carrying explosives are prohibited.

constructed. "Cumberland Mountain is a geologic thrust fault which means, when loosely interpreted,



⁴² Gloria Seabolt, 14 May 2002.

the rock strata of the mountain lays at a forty-five degree angle.”⁴³ “The pilot tunnel was driven to determine what kind of conditions construction of a main large bore would experience. As various rock formations were encountered the proper support systems were determined.”⁴⁴ In the 1980s, the transportation department embarked on a \$265 million construction project that blasted twin bore tunnels one mile in length through Cumberland Mountain.⁴⁵

There is no doubt that historic preservation was a factor in deciding how to relocate U.S. 25 E. At the same time, there is no doubt that economic stability and economic growth were motivating factors to build a safer and better road through Cumberland Gap. Southern Appalachia historically has been one of the poorest regions in



The town of Cumberland Gap hosted the Scotch-Irish Days Festive in April 1996. Townspeople dressed in Civil War Era styles to celebrate the heritage of the town and the Gap's role in the Civil War.
Picture Taken April 1996

the United States. By building a road of interstate quality, the government hoped to stimulate the economy of the region. A better road leads to more users of the road. By making the park more accessible to tourists during a period when “heritage tourism” has

become increasing popular in the United States, the government also hoped that the numbers of privately owned restaurants, hotels, stores and other service facilities would also increase. The fact that



The tunnel has increased traffic on U.S. 25 E. The D.O.T. is widening the 25 E to a four-lane highway in Tazwell, Tennessee.
Picture Taken October 2001

⁴³ Shattuck, 29.

⁴⁴ Shattuck, 29.

⁴⁵ Shattuck, 29.

Cumberland Gap provided an original gateway to the West and the fact that the road that runs through it was officially cut for settlers for the first time under the direction of the American hero Daniel Boone has only added to the marketability of the site. The Cumberland Gap tunnel and improvements to U.S. 25 E along with the completion of Interstates 81 and 75 have made the Gap and its historical significance more accessible to all Americans.

The National Park Service is working to preserve and return the Gap to its



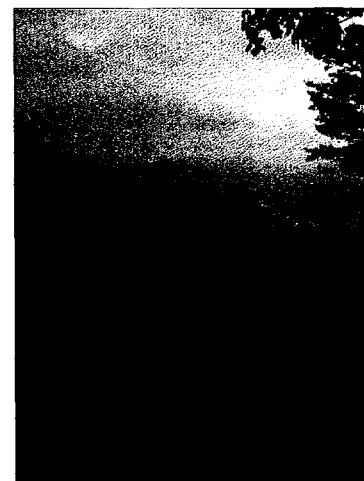
eighteenth-century appearance. After centuries of road construction, paved roads have been removed from the saddle of the Gap. As Gloria Seabolt explained, “It’s remarkable how they have changed Cumberland Gap” since they opened the tunnel and closed the mountain. “It is back to how it was when Daniel Boone crossed it.” They have removed old

U.S. 25 E and filled in the mountain where the road was. They have planted grass and trees. Gloria said her understanding of the current park project was to redo the road that leads up to the Pinnacle. The park service also is planning to delineate small areas within the park to commemorate the Civil War Era. According to Gloria, access to those landmarks is not going to be paved like it is now. The park is going to turn them back to dirt trails.

The Cumberland Gap National Historical Park is negotiating with area businesses and purchasing surrounding land to add to the park’s 20,463 acres.⁴⁶ In the fall of 1998,

⁴⁶ Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, <http://www.nps.gov/cuga/pphtml/facts.html>; Internet; accessed 11 May 2002.

park officials reached an agreement with Apollo Fuels to stop work on a three-mile-long strip mine before it came is around a ridge and into the immediate view from the Pinnacle. “Our concern was that this mine was going to end up right in the most scenic viewshed in the park,” Park Superintendent Mark H. Woods said. It took six years of disagreement and negotiations to preserve the historic landscape. In the end, Apollo Fuels agreed to stop mining the ridge and even “restore the land disturbed by that mine to its ‘approximate original contour’ and reforest it.”⁴⁷ “The settlement also prevents the company from digging deep into the mountain for coal after the surface seams have been stripped. That will protect the underground water sources so vital to the purity of Fern Lake, one of the last pristine water sources in the mountainous region.”⁴⁸



The view of Fern Lake from the Pinnacle Overlook
Picture from www.cuga.gov

The National Parks Service recently asked a U.S. Senate subcommittee to allow it to purchase Fern Lake, a reservoir visible from the Pinnacle Overlook. “Having Fern Lake and its watershed under National Park Service management would produce many benefits. It would protect the watershed from threats of future development and thus help protect for the long term the landscape and view the park is known for. It would allow for public recreational use of a lake that is currently available only to private club members. It would also allow the development of more hiking trails in the park. These additional

⁴⁷ Chris Fordney, “View for the Future,” *National Parks*, March 1999, 30-33.

⁴⁸ Fordney, 30-33.

attractions would thus increase recreational opportunities in a region that is working hard to generate tourism.”⁴⁹

The scenic appeal of Cumberland Gap National Historical Park is similar to that of the Great Smoky Mountains in southeastern Tennessee. But while visitors can enjoy the beauty of the southern Appalachian Mountains in both parks, only the Cumberland Gap Park can lay claim to this historical significance of the landscape. “The great gateway of Cumberland Gap”⁵⁰ represents the nation’s first frontier. The Wilderness Road through the Gap carried goods, people, and ideas across the mountains into Kentucky and beyond. Cumberland Gap was a crucial symbolic participant in shaping the origins of an American national identity.

“No single individual has been associated with the Gap more than Daniel Boone who used it for the first time in 1769,”⁵¹ and the Cumberland Gap National Historical Park actively uses his image and his association with the gap to promote the park. George Caleb Bingham’s “Daniel Boone Escorting Settlers Through the Cumberland Gap” painted in 1851 and 1852,⁵² appears on the cover of the official map and guide to the park. “A large portion of the display panels” at the small museum in the visitor center “describe[s] the pioneer movement west and the life of one of the most famous men of the time, Daniel Boone.”⁵³ The panels illustrate Boone’s association with Henderson, the

⁴⁹ Department of the Interior, National Park Service, congressional statement before the subcommittee on National Parks of the Senate committee on Energy and Natural Resources concerning S. 1061 and H.R. 2238, the Fern Lake Conservation and Recreation Act of 2001 (February 14, 2002), by Durand Jones, www.nps.gov/legal/testimony/107th/cumgapnp.htm; Internet; accessed 11 May 2002.

⁵⁰ Thomas Clark, “The Wilderness Road,” in Kincaid, *The Wilderness Road*, 5th ed. (Middlesboro, Kentucky, 1973).

⁵¹ Department of the Interior, *Location of the Wilderness Road*, 26.

⁵² Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, GPO: 2001- 472-470/00416, Reprint 2000.

⁵³ Shattuck, 6.

settlement of Boonesborough, and the capture of Jemima Boone by Indians and her subsequent rescue by her father, Daniel.⁵⁴

The park does not need to promote Boone himself; oral tradition and published writings began that process in his own lifetime, and it continued throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. Actor Fess Parker brought Boone to life as the “ripin’ est, roarin’ est, fightin’ est man the frontier ever knew”⁵⁵ in the Daniel Boone television series that aired in the 1960s. Generations of historians have also contributed to the exaggeration and promotion of Boone as the national icon for the American frontier.

In the words of Lyman Draper,

“He was not merely a hunter. He was on a mission. The spiritual sense was strong in him. He felt the union between his inner and the nature of the visible world and yearned for their intimate communion. His thoughts and his feelings were those of a great discoverer. He could realize the feelings of a Columbus or a Balboa and thus gazing over the ocean waste of forest which then spread from the dim western outline of the Alleghenies to the distinct and untrammelled waters of the Mississippi, he was quite as much isolated as ever any of the great admirals who set forth on the Atlantic still dreaming of Cathay.”⁵⁶

In life and in death, Boone has attracted people to the Cumberland Gap.

Assuming Lowenthal’s theory is correct, people visit pioneer museums not to appreciate



The Cumberland Gap National Historical Park began researching the location of the Wilderness Road through the park in 1984. By April 2002, the park had completed this bridge over the creek and below the cave described by Thomas Walker in 1750. *Picture Taken April 2002*

what was done in the historical time period under study, but to celebrate the achievements of civilization. In life,

⁵⁴ Shattuck, 6-8.

⁵⁵ Draper, 1.

⁵⁶ Draper, 240.

Boone helped to open the frontier to Anglo-American settlement, and long after his death, the Boone legend continues to attract visitors to the Cumberland Gap national historical park, which commemorates the site's role as a gateway to the west.

The intent of the park is to commemorate the Wilderness Road⁵⁷, a dirt trail that became an important route to the west after the American Revolution. Visitors celebrate the Wilderness Road through Cumberland Gap because it symbolizes the American spirit and civilization's ability to overcome harsh Mother Nature and brutal Indian attacks. Most Americans today come to Cumberland Gap for an avowedly Turnerian purpose, to celebrate the road and the taming of the first frontier.

The park deliberately set out to make the original Wilderness Road the focal point of the commemoration, but in the process of restoring and preserving the historic road and landscape, the park has given America another landmark, the tunnel. The twin bore tunnel through Cumberland Mountain is "the most modern technology available in the world today."⁵⁸ Not only can people walk the Wilderness Road and retrace the footsteps of Daniel Boone over the mountain, they can experience the technology of the twenty-first century and drive through the mountain. Today's visitor to Cumberland Gap can literally experience the technological progress of civilization. Cumberland Gap does indeed provide "a continuum across time, a link with the past,"⁵⁹ although perhaps not in the way that the original author of the phrase intended. It reveals the continuous role of

⁵⁷ The trail Boone blazed was not called the Wilderness Road until the 1790s, when the state of Kentucky commissioned the improvement of Boone's Trace. From my experience at the Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, the Wilderness Road trail resembles Boone's time period more than it does the 1790s road. What I walked was more of a footpath than a road wide enough for a wagon.

⁵⁸ Shattuck, 20.

⁵⁹ Department of the Interior, *Location of the Wilderness Road*, 81.

the dual mythologies of Daniel Boone and Frederick Jackson Turner in shaping American national identity.